

11,19,20 The Spiritual Formation of the End Time Remnant (Part 8)

This is our final study in the letters in Rev. 2&3, and it will also be a summation of the concept of the overcomer – the end time remnant.

Laodicea brings us to the last phase of church history and in every generation of Christians since Pentecost, including this one, there has been a remnant who have found within themselves a dissatisfaction with life in “maintenance” or “status quo” mode.

They know they personally need to go further spiritually than they have gone, and they are heartbroken over the condition of the church.

These people are not better than anyone else. They’re just more determined than most to find out what life in Christ is really meant to be.

There is an unexplainable hunger within them to understand. It obsesses them; there’s an inward pull to experience “the truth that sets us free”.

So, let’s start with the title our Lord gives of Himself in vs. 1;

“The Amen, the faithful and true witness; the Origin of the creation of God”.

By calling Himself the *“Origin of the creation of God”* He is re-emphasizing His position as the Source and Explanation of all that is to characterize God's creation.

Everything that exists is to be characterized by the nature of Christ.

Vs. 17 helps us to see the specifics of the Laodicean’s problem,

“You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing.’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.”

These saints are completely unaware of their true spiritual condition.

There is only one solution to the problem of self-deception and it's given to us in vs. 18 and 19,

"I advise you to buy gold from Me – gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be ashamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love, be diligent and turn from your indifference."

1. Gold purified by fire
2. Eyes opened to reality
3. And being clothed in practical righteousness

Pressure (fire) in our lives is given to bring about the shattering of pride and self-sufficiency and to bring us into a living faith; just as when the Lord allowed Satan to sift Peter as wheat to break his pride.

Then vs. 20 shows us that once the fire has broken the breakable, a restoration of humble, sweet fellowship can be renewed.

Self is shoved out and Christ is invited in.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If you will hear Me calling and open the door I will come in and we will share a meal as friends."

The final connection between Christ's solution for Laodicea and the promise to the overcomer is in vs. 21

"For him that overcomes, I will grant to sit with Me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne."

Setting our interests aside to pursue the interests of Christ, is the path to the Throne. It's also called 'picking up our cross'. I'm going to read Walter Scott's comments on this:

"The 'throne' is the sign and symbol of royal authority and dominion. How did Jesus reach His Father's throne and sit down with Him in that exalted seat? Not by inherent right only! But by His life of patience and His sacrifice for His Father's glory. The conqueror's path lies open to us, His example is our joy. His footprints our guide-marks. . . Without a doubt salvation and eternal life are free gifts of the grace of God, granted to faith on the basis of the sacrifice of Golgotha. But the degree of glory, the victor's garland, is according to the faithfulness of the believer. "

Revelation 2 and 3 lay out the history of the church age and, as with Israel, it is marked with a general departure from God's original intent, but there is also, in every generation, remnant victory.

In this last phase of church history (the time we're living in now) a general lukewarmness is prophesied with promises given to overcoming individuals.

Now, let's dig down to the personal elements of those individuals and see if we can determine not only who they are, but how we fit in.

The first thing we need to realize is that the overcomer, more than anyone else, is fully aware of the truth we see in Rom. 5:1-2,

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

Only the genuinely poor in spirit (those who are painfully aware of their own spiritual poverty) really appreciate what it means to "stand in grace".

Lindsay sent me this quote last week, which is a great definition of grace;

"What if there was a place so safe that the worst of you could be known, and you would be loved more in the telling of it?"

Grace honors transparency, not perfection. Hebrews tells us that we have a throne of grace we can appeal to “in time of need”, which is pretty much always.

The father lavished His love and attention much more on the repentant, transparent, prodigal than on his older brother.

This is what it means to walk in the light as He is in the light.

We aren't afraid to both acknowledge and bring all we are to the Lord – to the throne of grace.

Legalism, self-introspection, and self-condemnation has permeated the church due to the accusation work of the enemy. He's the 'accuser of the brethren'; it's his job.

We've all been tormented by the doubts, the guilt and in-our-face reality of our sinfulness.

Jesus was well aware of this, which is why one of His first offers to the nation of Israel was this:

“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30)

Now, let's think about this for a minute.

This offer is being made to people like you and me – to people who sin, who doubt, who struggle with fear and worry.

But for many of us, the churches and families we were raised in have not only *not* released us from these things, but have doubled down on them.

Jesus said that His yoke is “easy and light” and that if we learned of Him, we would have “rest”.

Why aren't we free then? Why does His yoke and burden seem anything *but* easy and light? Why is inner rest only a pipe dream rather than a present reality?

Let's assume we believe what the Lord said, but nothing is changing anyway, no matter how much we ask Him to make these things real for us.

Now what? Again, our minds are being flooded with constant lies.

"No, God doesn't accept you as you are". "You've failed way too many times to expect grace to cover it". "Look in the mirror, do you seriously think you're doing well spiritual and morally – who are you trying to fool? God is definitely not fooled by your worthless attempts to be faithful."

And on it goes. Every day. Relentlessly.

There's only one way out.

We have to *not* believe our emotions, self-evaluations and the voices in our heads that contradict what Christ has already told us in parables like the Prodigal Son and passages like Matt. 11.

Now, let's do a quick capstone of what we've seen in these churches:

"Ephesus" – Zealous for religious activity, but drifting away from "First Love"

"Smyrna" – Kept humble and faithful through persecution

"Pergamum" – The beginning of idolatry and immorality

"Thyatira" – Full scale legalism and spiritual blackout under Roman Catholicism

"Sardis" – The dead formalism of Protestantism

"Philadelphia" – Renewed, genuine spiritual life

"Laodicea" – Lazy, arrogant, indifferent and self-satisfied

When you hear an overview like that, can you see the common threads that define the overcomer?

Their commitment is to Christ not Christianity (this is “first love” – it’s very personal); they were not Nicolaitans, or Roman Catholics, or Protestants. They did not give in to immorality or lukewarm indifference to the truth.

I don’t know the details of all of your lives, so I can’t get specific, but I *can* give you some guiding principles that may help with much of what you might be wondering about.

Resisting and pushing against anything we are aware of that the Lord wants out of our lives is both difficult and exhausting. As the author to the Hebrews puts it;

Heb. 12:4; *“In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”*

And Heb. 12:14 tells us to “pursue holiness.”

If we don’t fight in our pursuit of holiness, we will never learn how to overcome it by discovering the practical reality of God’s strength in our weakness.

The overcomer is not the one who instantly conquers whatever the Lord is asking to be taken away; the overcomer is the one who doesn’t justify it or rationalize it.

It’s the honesty, the transparency truth, we’ve seen in 1 John 1.

They acknowledge their failure in this area and strive daily to set aside what the Lord wants out of their lives.

In other words, God eventually honors their tenacity and by His grace they “overcome” it.

In Acts 10, God had to tell Peter three times to eat pork. At first Peter resisted and became defensive, but finally he obeyed.

Since the Lord knew his heart, Peter was in the camp of the overcomers even when he *wasn’t* overcoming.

The Lord knew that even if Peter failed, he would still *try* to walk on water if that's what his Master wanted.

God's servants in both the Old and New Testament failed a million times (God has no problem with that), but they didn't stop fighting.

It's not failure that disqualifies us; it's accepting defeat.

And never forget that the Lord *only* asks us to give up those things that are, in some way, bringing us into bondage or limitation (whether we can see the connection or not).

He's only working on removing things that would decrease our happiness and spiritual effectiveness.

All of His exhortations and disciplines come from a heart of infinite love and wisdom. To resist what He is asked is both self-deception and self-destructive.

His goal is our greatest joy and peace in both time and eternity. Our idea of what will get us there is usually completely the opposite of His, because His ways are not our ways.

The way the writer to the Hebrews puts it is related to the fact that the Lord is desiring to move us fully into His rest – and He knows what it will take to get us there.

Let me share some thoughts by Sparks on this

“Why all these exhortations in the New Testament to go on? Why is the New Testament just made up of exhortations and encouragements to the people of God about going on? Because real spiritual progress and the Presence of the Lord depends upon bringing everything that we know right up to date. "Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart." Again and again, those words are put in the New Testament. Today! Today! You see, all this has got to be brought into now. All our progress for the future depends

upon what we are doing with what we know now. Going on means putting into practice and effect all the Lord has said to us. Our growing knowledge of the Lord depends entirely upon our daily obedience to the light which we have. So, when the Lord speaks, and we say: "There is something to be done about this. I do not just put that into the store of my knowledge. I do not just add that to all that I know. I look to see what that requires of me in a practical way. The people who do that will be going on; they will be entering into His Rest. They will be entering into the joy of the Lord. That is what it means to go on."

Back to the more general principles.

Most of us are already in Smyrna to some degree, because we are under increasing pressure.

And the same is true with regard to Philadelphia. It's our disappointment with where we are, coupled with our desire to move past this, that has given us a Philadelphian hunger for genuine spiritual life.

The other common thread that defines the overcomer is actually stated in all seven churches;

"He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

If you could get a 30,000 ft. view of American churches, you'd see how incredibly rare it is to find anyone genuinely interested in the "present tense" of God speaking to us.

There is almost no interest in eschatology (as we've seen before).

As a whole, the church in the West is absolutely not "hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches".

But the overcomers are.

They are trying to stay on a straight path; they are praying for the Lord's return and they desire to learn all they can about our place and purpose in this generation.

Let's go a little further with this.

When you see in Matt. 24:34, that the generation which sees the rebirth of Israel will be the generation that sees the return of the Lord, as an overcomer, desiring to know the Lord's mind on this, you go into determined prayer and study so that, as Paul tells us in 1 Thess. 5:4-6;

“. . . you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch.”

Only those with an ear to hear will be awake, because they are the only ones who will not be asleep concerning the timing of the Lord's coming for us when that time comes.

In Luke 12:54-56; Jesus gave a severe rebuke to those in His generation who did *not* know the timing of His first coming;

“Whenever you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘A shower is coming,’ and so it turns out. And whenever you feel a south wind blowing, you say, ‘It will be a hot day,’ and it turns out that way. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, but how is it that you do not know how to interpret this present time you are living in?”

Now, we're in the generation of His *second* coming, and Paul makes it clear that the same principle applies.

The Laodiceans are asleep; the Philadelphians are awake.

1 Chron. 12:31-32; *“From the half-tribe of Manasseh: 18,000 designated by name to come and make David king. From Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.”*

In their generation, these men from Issachar, knew exactly what God wanted them to do in their generation. For them it was to make David king.

Knowing our time in history and the implications of that in real life is a foundational characteristic of an overcomer in any generation.

I know there’s skepticism about my teaching on the nearness of the Lord’s coming.

That’s fine; no one is accountable to me. As Paul wrote in Rom. 14:4-5;

“To our own master we stand or fall . . . Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.”

You don’t have to be convinced about what I’m saying; but you *do* have to be convinced and in sync about what *the Lord* is saying.

There’s a huge difference between skepticism about what others are saying and deciding that you don’t need to know what the Bible teaches about this.

Those who either don’t care or won’t pray and study diligently enough to discover what the truth *really* is, are definitely not overcomers.

Because as I said earlier, in this generation the reality of hearing what the Spirit is saying at this time in history to prepare the Lord’s people for His coming, is a foundational mark of God’s end-time remnant.

Now, let’s switch gears and look at a principle Paul gives us in 2 Cor. 8:12 to help reassure us that the gap we all feel between what we are and what we believe we should be is *not* a disqualification.

“For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that which a man hath, and not according to that which he does not have.”

In its context, this verse is talking about giving in a local assembly. But in principle it shows us exactly how the Lord views what we would probably call “responsibility”.

The Lord isn't focused on how advanced we are, He's looking first at the degree of willingness we have to be what He desires us to be.

When He sees a “willing mind”, that's accepted by Him according to whatever spiritual measure in this life we have attained. His acceptance is *not* according to the vast amount of growth we have *not* yet moved into.

God will honor us if we are walking in the light we have, even if that walk is far from perfect. There is no expectation that we walk in the light we do *not* have.

Carrying us to maturity – completing what He's begun in us – and countless other passages make it clear that He is more than willing to take us all the way “if first there be a willing mind”.

As we've already seen, the church globally is being rapidly divided into what is essentially Philadelphian versus Laodicean spirituality.

We don't have to be Paul – we just have to *not* be Laodicea.

I'll close with a few more thoughts on this.

Last week I used 1 Cor. 1 to show that those God has called into His purpose are made up of a very unique kind of people. I'll reread that section and highlight what the Lord is looking for in us.

“For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the insignificant things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no

human may boast before God. But it is due to Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Lay this over the grid of your life.

Not wise in the eyes of the world; not powerful in status; not respected as a noble member of worldly culture; foolish, weak, insignificant and despised.

Why does it have to be this way? So, we don't end up like Lucifer;

"So that no human may boast before God."

Pride caused the fall of Satan; pride is the worst thing we would want to see surface in us.

Weakness increases the need for, and activity of, God. It keeps us humble and safe – dependent on the Lord for every breath we take.

Overcomers are the exact opposite of what we would naturally think they would be. Just like Jesus, who didn't conquer Rome but instead said, "I am meek and lowly of heart; learn of Me and you will find rest for your souls."

God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

The "overcomers" of Heb. 11 show us that weakness and inability deepen faith, because weakness causes faith to be directed away from us; away from all self-expectation. This is what the Lord desires most in us – faith in Him, not in us.

As Andrew Murray once wrote,

"Faith leads the seeking soul to depend on God alone, never upon himself. Faith believes God's Word, clings to Him, and waits in patient trust that His power will work within us everything that He has promised."